

Cabinet

13 February 2024

Member Question (1 total)

1. Question from Councillor David Willingham to Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas

In light of the number of people who arrive severely inebriated at Cheltenham Spa station on early morning trains during race week, and the impact this has on local communities as well as the pressure it puts on Gloucestershire Constabulary, and noting that many football trains are “dry”, would the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities join me in calling on the British Transport Police and the Train Operating Companies, to designate all trains arriving at Cheltenham Spa station before 10am during March race-week as alcohol-free, to reduce the early morning nuisance caused by racegoers getting incapably drunk on those trains, and to allow those who are likely to become a nuisance to be detrained and detained at locations well away from Cheltenham, such as Bristol, Swindon, Worcester or Birmingham, so they don't get to Cheltenham to cause disorder later?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Willingham.

Contact was made with GWR and the British Transport Police regarding the concerns you have raised and the response from the British Transport Police is below from Mark Cleland, BTP Superintendent, who is responsible for the BTP operation for Cheltenham, explaining why in their opinion “dry trains” is not the right issue to focus on.

- *The BTP policing operation extends far wider than Cheltenham as we police routes into Cheltenham from Birmingham, Bristol, South Wales and London, with a police presence at stations that extend across those routes.*
- *Crime rates on the railway are very low during the festival, on average we make maybe one or 2 arrests and they tend to be on the return after the event which is usually alcohol fuelled as a result of drinking at the event and not on trains. I checked the crime for the 2023 festival and I can see we had no reports of crime at all at that location.*
- *We have no issues with passengers travelling on the forward to the event, even if consuming alcohol. We have very few issues on trains leaving the event as the trains are so full and we tend to have officers travel with the trains. Most issues happen in the queues with people arriving at the station*

after leaving the racecourse which is where they've consumed too much alcohol.

- To manage dry trains would be extremely difficult due to the profile of the event with people travelling from all over the UK, we would have to resource police officers at a huge number of locations to prevent people bringing alcohol onto trains and due to the low levels of crime, this would not be proportionate.*
- The greatest issue around alcohol consumption is due to people getting drunk at the racecourse and in pubs in Cheltenham. That is what impacts on the railway. There never seems to be an ask around having a dry event, so no alcohol served at the racecourse or in the city centre. If there was to be a complete ban on alcohol for the event, then it would make sense for the railway to have dry trains. As it's the racecourse and the city centre that creates all the issues with alcohol fuelled ASB then it would not be proportionate for the trains to be dry as they aren't what causes the problem.*

We have a clear evidence base that the railway is not the issue, but rather the serving of alcohol everywhere else is.

I am very happy to meet with you to discuss the response further should you wish to do so.